

# **Enhancing Beginning Reading Skills Through Poetry**

*Pamela Elters*

*Mitchell Elementary School*

**Overview**

**Rationale**

**Objectives**

**Strategies**

**Classroom Activities**

**Bibliography**

**Appendices**

**Standards**

## **Overview**

Children must master reading at a very young age. How can we combine this journey with poetry? In studying the first grade curriculum of The School District of Philadelphia one finds that we need to teach beginning readers the building blocks needed to become fluent readers. These include rhyme, describing words, punctuation, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. In covering these focus skills which are included in the state standards; the subject of literacy is the prevalent one.

This unit will look at the works of Shel Silverstein and William Carlos Williams. Silverstein has succeeded in teaching these objectives in a fun, colorful, and exciting world a child can enjoy. William Carlos Williams' poetry will allow the students to open up the imagination to see a more realistic image. The children will learn through repetition, reading, and close reading. The final product of each lesson will be a published piece that will use background knowledge they have acquired on their own. The piece will be brainstormed, prewritten, edited, with the final piece being a finished copy with illustration.

In writing through the rationale of the unit I will explain why children need to learn the concepts of poetry. It will discuss the importance of rhyme, fluency, word choice, punctuation, and comprehension in a beginning reader.

## **Rationale**

Children's minds are sponges that are able to absorb what is taught to them at an early age. The concepts being taught must be repeated over and over in various ways for them to master them. By exposing them to these concepts through poetry it opens other avenues for learning.

Children need all the right tools to be able to read. Having them fall in love with words is probably one of the most important and effective ways to spark the love of reading. What better way to fall in love with words than through poetry? Poetry builds phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and the hearing of small words and sounds in speech and gives a firm foundation for emergent readers. In reading and listening to narratives the child misses the opportunity to hear the sounds and rhythm that thrive in poetry. It also teaches children that in a few short words or phrases the expression of emotion, thoughts, and humor can be found.

Children need to interact with language in all that they do. They interact with sound and rhythm when reading poetry aloud. In order to interact with language they need to connect with the words and make them have meaning in their world. Poetry makes this easier than narrative because it can connect with simple and complex ideas: colors, feelings, objects, and just the world around them. This makes it easier for them to make a relationship between their world and their writing and understanding poetry.

When a child learns to read and understand poetry through close readings his or her world of vocabulary, pronunciation, syllables, punctuation, and comprehension can blossom. In executing this method the poem must first be heard in its' entirety by the child. In order for this to take place the poem needs to be broken down line by line, word by word with them. In doing so the skills needed for reading are being closely emphasized. Having the child repeat expression and sound as modeled by the adult ties into their fluency. In reading line by line comprehension, characters, settings, and meanings can all come into full view. These are all skills needed to be able to read narrative. Choral reading also boosts the child's reading confidence level.

***Listen to the mustn'ts, child. Listen to the don'ts. Listen to the shouldn'ts, the impossibles, the won'ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me... Anything can happen, child. Anything can be." (Silverstein)***

Shel Silverstein was a brilliant author and illustrator who used his bold humor and unique imagination to create poetry which has intrigued both children and adults for many years. In the study of poetry with young children, one cannot ignore his works. He brings everyday happenings and creates visuals and allows for children and adults to relate. Simple ideas such as homework, sandboxes, animals, and messy bedrooms. The language and images Silverstein used makes teaching poetry a joy for all. He also allows us to incorporate his writings in the teaching of reading skills builds vocabulary, imagery, and fluency. It is a great place to begin the love of poetry for a young child.

William Carlos Williams wrote without the rigid and ordered familiarity of poetry of his time. He became part of the imagist movement. The imagists used "swift, uncluttered, functional phrasing" (poetry foundation). He wanted his poetry to speak the language of the American people not the English country folk. His poems are honest with emotions. In many ways he is similar to Silverstein. Both speak honestly and create clear images

with their poetry.

## **Objectives**

This unit is intended for students in first grade. They are in a self-contained classroom for all major subjects. Art, Library, Computers, Physical Education are taught by a specialist teacher outside the homeroom for 45 minutes every day. They have a 45-minute lunch/recess period. This lunch/recess time is a combination of outdoor and indoor activity, depending on the weather. Some children receive special education for math or reading for ½ hour.

The objectives are as follows:

- Exposure to different forms of poetry
- Reading aloud
- Collective close readings
- Comparing poetry of William Carlos Williams to Shel Silverstein
- Writing their own poems that are the same style as the poem being discussed
- Using background knowledge to produce images to write about

## **Strategies**

The strategies for this unit will encompass a variety of methods. Direct instruction will be the dominant strategy. Included in the direct instruction will be read alouds of the various poems. There will also be close readings of poems. The students will be involved in using their prior and learned knowledge to answer questions orally and write. They will engage in a variety of activities to reinforce the lessons. The writing process will be used for brainstorming, rough drafts, editing and publishing.

### Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is teacher-led. Many methods can be used for direct instruction. It can be done small group or whole group. This will include the initial read alouds of the poems by the teacher. It is also the time for mini lessons on rhyme, describing words, punctuation, and vocabulary.

### Shared Reading

The strategy of shared reading will be used in every lesson of this unit. Shared reading is a read aloud to the entire class. Through this method children learn reading skills by listening to inflection, phrasing, punctuation, and questioning. After the reading children interact by discussing various skills such as beginning, middle, end or characters,

problems, and solutions.

### Close Reading

The strategy of close reading will be used in every lesson of this unit. Close reading is a reading in which the poems will be discussed according to the words and phrases to allow for differences of interpretation and explanation of vocabulary with the entire class or with small groups. If done as a group, sections of the poem are assigned to individuals. The individual gives a definition or interpretation of their word or phrase and what they think it means in the piece. It can then be discussed by others in the group. Through this method, children learn reading skills by listening to and discussing inflection, phrasing, punctuation, and vocabulary. After the reading, children interact by discussing various meanings and interpretations.

During close reading ideas can and will be exchanged for interpretation of a piece. Discussions can then be teacher led or child led. Within the close reading discussions vocabulary becomes a focus when different meanings emerge and this will enable the interpretations to vary.

### Prior Knowledge

By activating prior knowledge the child begins to make connections to things they already know. They use schema to connect to self or connect to other stories that have been read by them or to them. When the child can make a personal connection the book, passage, or poem holds much more value to their person.

### Prior Knowledge

By activating prior knowledge the child begins to make connections to things they already know. They use schema to connect to self or connect to other stories that have been read by them or to them. When the child can make a personal connection the book holds much more value to their person.

### Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are a type of mapping that lets the child put things in order. When using these aides it is easier for them to recall and see what the big ideas of their writing are. By connecting what is in their brain to paper, we are securing the knowledge that they have recalled for their writing.

### Modeling

Modeling is the process where the instructor shows certain behaviors he or she is expecting to see in the end result. It can involve reading, writing, or math. The instructor

verbally explains as they demonstrate the activity for the class. In the demonstration student ideas are taken to enhance the activity, and to have the students take ownership of what is expected from them.

### Writing Process

The culminating activity will be for the child to write a finished poem. The process of writing will encompass brainstorming, graphic organizer, rough or “sloppy” copy, self editing, editing with the teacher and final copy.

### Illustrating

The culminating activity will also include an illustration. The method of illustration will be painting to express what they have written. Some children are more expressive through art than they are through writing. This will enable those children to see poetry as an art form as well as a writing form.

The time frame for this unit is four lessons over a two week period. The first three lessons will be close readings and comparisons of William Carlos Williams poems to Shel Silverstein poems. Each lesson will include a short writing assignment of their own poem that they can compare to the poems that have been shared. These writings will be shared with classmates if they so choose. They will also be illustrated to help the children understand the thought process of their peers. Through these short writings the discussions of elements of poems that don't have to be standard i.e.: rhyming, length, form, and vocabulary. The same procedure will take place for the first three lessons.

The final writing piece will be a five day process to include brainstorming, graphic organizer, pre-writing, editing, final writing, an illustration.

## **Classroom Activities**

### Lesson 1

#### Objective:

The student will be able to determine meaning of vocabulary for description and compare two poems. The student will be able to express on paper similar form.

#### Materials:

Two poems:

Appendix 1

“The Red Wheelbarrow” William Carlos Williams

“The Hammock” Shel Silverstein

Paper

Pencil

Crayons

#### Procedure:

Teacher will read both poems aloud and show no illustration. Model close read of the poems with the whole class participating.

Divide into two groups. Each group to close read one of the poems. Look for descriptive words, images formed.

Each group will form an illustration from collaboration and share with the other group.

Compare the two poems to see what is the same about them and what is different.

Discuss whether the poems rhyme and do poems have to rhyme?

#### Extension:

Work in groups of 4 Brainstorm an object the students are familiar with from their background knowledge. Each group will create a poem that gives us an image and illustrate. Group students in ability levels – writers, illustrators, creators – so that all can be successful.

### Lesson 2

#### Objective:

Students will be able to compare two poems and write a description of a familiar place.

#### Materials:

2 poems:

Appendix 2

“Between Walls” William Carlos Williams

“The Messy Room” Shel Silverstein

Paper

Pencil

Crayons

Procedure:

Teacher will read both poems aloud and show no illustration. Model close reading as a class with the teacher.

Divide into two groups. Each group to close read one of the poems. Look for descriptive words, images formed.

Each group will form an illustration from collaboration and share with the other group.

Compare the two poems to see what is the same about them and what is different.

Discuss and brainstorm familiar places.

Extension:

Work with a partner to create a poem about a familiar place. Illustrate and share with another partner group.

Lesson 3

Objective:

Students will be able to compare two poems for feelings and compose their own.

Materials:

Two poems:

Appendix 3

“This Is Just To Say” William Carlos Williams

“Bear in There” Shel Silverstein

Pencil

Paper

Crayons

Procedure:

The Teacher will read aloud both poems. The class will close read as a group. Discuss

how what is happening in the two poems makes you feel. How does it make the writer feel? Brainstorm about having something you own taken.

Extension:

Each child will write words about how they would feel if something of theirs was taken. It can be written in a serious or funny way. Share with the class.

Lesson 4

Objective:

The student will be able to create a written poem capturing an image, feelings about a certain circumstance, or a description of a familiar place. These should be able to create images in the readers mind through use of descriptive language in a concise writing.

Materials:

Graphic Organizer – Appendix 4

Paper

Pencil

Crayons

Procedure:

Brainstorm ideas of their own on paper. Chose the one idea they wish to write about and organize those ideas on a graphic organizer. Do a prewriting of their poem. Self edit. Teacher conference and final edit together. Write final copy. Illustrate and share writing with the class.

This should take about a week to produce because it is done in short pieces due to the age of the child.

Extension:

Before sharing the illustration of their poem, break into small groups. Each group close reads a poem that was not written by a child in the group. Each person listening draws what they think the image is. After this is complete compare the illustrations to the author's.



## **Bibliography**

eHow Contributor. [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4449516\\_teach-beginnings-reading](http://www.ehow.com/how_4449516_teach-beginnings-reading)

Silverstein, Shel. <http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/bookfinder/celebrating-poetry>

Silverstein, Shel. <http://shelsilversteinpoems.wordpress.com>

Silverstein, Shel. <http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/shel-silverstein/13481>, April 22, 2004.

Williams, William Carlos. <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/104>

Williams, William Carlos. <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88u/wcw-between-walls.html>

<http://www.biography.com/people/shel-silverstein-948391>

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/william-carlos-williams>

<https://www.readingrockets.org/article/35/>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

*The Red Wheelbarrow*

by [William Carlos Williams](#)

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

*Hammock*

Grandma sent the hammock,

The good Lord sent the breeze.

I'm here to do the swinging—

Now, who's gonna move the trees?

~*Shel Silverstein*

## Appendix 2

William Carlos Williams, "Between Walls" (1938)

the back wings  
of the

hospital where  
nothing

will grow lie  
cinders

in which shine  
the broken

pieces of a green  
bottle

*Messy Room*  
by Shel Silverstein

Whoever room this is should be ashamed!  
His underwear is hanging on the lamp.  
His raincoat is there in the overstuffed chair,  
And the chair is becoming quite mucky and damp.  
His workbook is wedged in the window,  
His sweater's been thrown on the floor.  
His scarf and one ski are beneath the TV,  
And his pants have been carelessly hung on the door.  
His books are all jammed in the closet,  
His vest has been left in the hall.  
A lizard named Ed is asleep in his bed,  
And his smelly old sock has been stuck to the wall.  
Whoever room this is should be ashamed!  
Donald or Robert or Willie or--  
Huh? You say it's mine? Oh, dear,  
I knew it looked familiar!

Appendix 3

*This Is Just To Say*

by [William Carlos Williams](#)

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

*Bear In There*

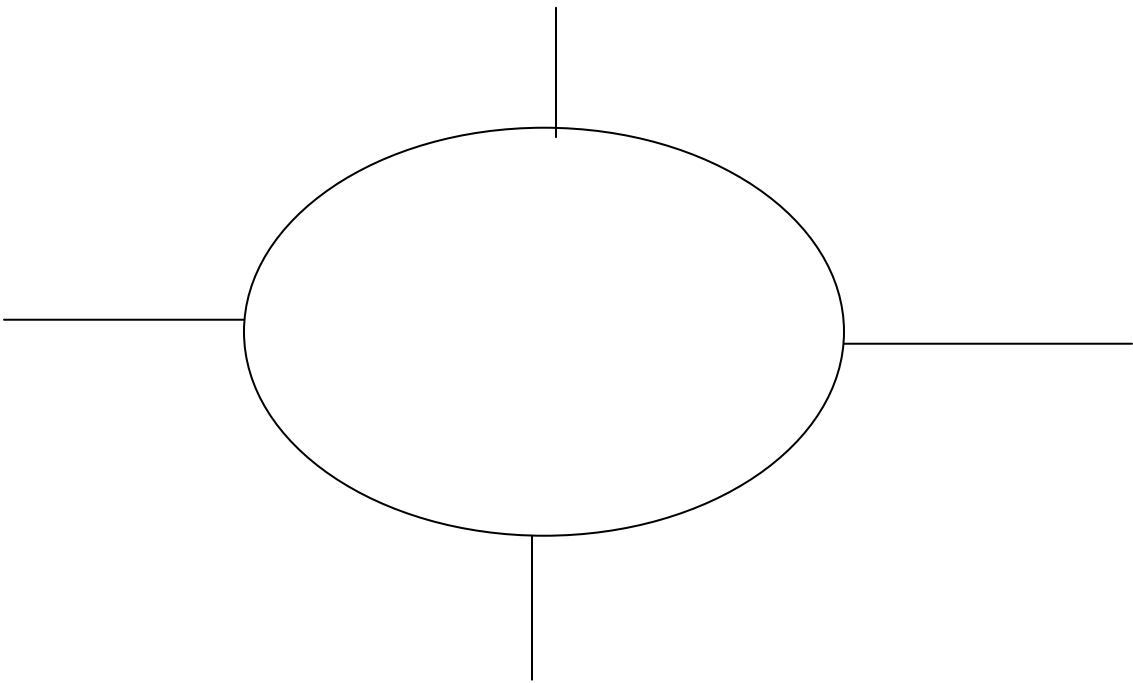
by Shel Silverstein

There's a Polar Bear  
In our Frigidaire--  
He likes it 'cause it's cold in there.  
With his seat in the meat  
And his face in the fish  
And his big hairy paws  
In the buttery dish,  
He's nibbling the noodles,  
He's munching the rice,  
He's slurping the soda,  
He's licking the ice.  
And he lets out a roar  
If you open the door.  
And it gives me a scare  
To know he's in there--  
That Polary Bear  
In our Fridgitydaire.

Appendix 4

Graphic Organizer

Write main idea in the center. Write 4 describing words on lines.



## **Standards**

Pennsylvania Academic Standards will be followed as required by the School District of Philadelphia. This standard will encompass reading and writing requirements for the first grade.

1.3.1.F: Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.

1.2.2.F: Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.

1.4.1.F: Chose words and phrases for effect

1.5.1.E: Add drawings and other visual displays when sharing aloud to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

1.5.1. D: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.